

**Submission into the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021**

**Submission No.:** 896

**Submitted by:** [REDACTED]

**Publication:** Making the submission public but withholding your name

**Position:** I/We support the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill but recommend some changes to it.

**Comments in relation to:** Eligibility criteria\* ,Conscientious objection by either individuals or entities

**Attachments:** See attachment

**Submitter Comments:**

## INQUIRY INTO THE VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL, 2021.

I see that one criterion of the Queensland Government's proposed eligibility for voluntary assisted dying (VAD) is that the person is expected to die within 12 months. I would like to raise objections to this designated timeframe because:

\*Historically, doctors have been reluctant – even refused – to tell a patient how long they have to live, yet they are now able to do this under the proposed Bill. How can anyone predict time of death for certain?

\*Access to VAD should not depend on this, alone. Many people suffer with long term, incurable, painful illnesses, such as Multiple Sclerosis and Motor Neurone Disease and no amount of palliative care will adequately help them. Some conditions have a longer prognosis, but the pain is, nonetheless intolerable. How can we allow others to decide that these people should continue to suffer indefinitely?

\*How can anyone know the degree of suffering experienced by another? To limit accessibility to VAD to only those who might be thought to die within 12 months, is to condemn others to unlimited suffering. Who, amongst us has the right to do that? People do not allow their pets to suffer, and have them undergo euthanasia in order to free them from pain, yet they still seem to think it is acceptable for humans to suffer, which could go way beyond the 12 month period designated as a prerequisite to accessing VAD.

\*If it is what the individual chooses, VAD should not be disallowed because some other considers the individual's reason not to be valid; if it is what the individual chooses, the reason is irrelevant, whether it is thought that the individual will die within 12 months or will live longer.

It is well known that most protesters to any VAD Bill are from various religious groups, mostly Catholics. I understand that a 2019 survey of opinions on VAD showed that 95% of those who did not identify with a religion would support VAD. A retired minister, the Reverend Sid Rogers, has questioned the right of anyone to deny someone else's decision to end their life, noting that VAD is not being legislated as compulsory for all. I am in agreement with this and would say to protesters that if they choose to die in agony, that is their choice & I would not deny them that choice. However, we should not allow them to deny others the choice to die in dignity, with loving family around them, who know and accept that it was the choice of the individual. Peaceful deaths have much better outcomes for the bereaved, particularly when contrasted with facing the horror of a messy suicide, which many of those suffering, turn to in desperation because there is no other way out. The family has the comfort of knowing that their family member did not die alone. Indeed, the suicide rates would likely fall, when people know that they have a choice if necessary. Once the choice is available, many choose not to die; it is the knowledge that the choice is there that provides comfort to those facing severe pain.

Churches and religions should not impose their beliefs upon others.  
Minor groups should not be permitted to impose their particular creed or morals on the entire population.  
Freedom of religion does not mean imposing those beliefs on others.

The Australian Medical Association's definition of euthanasia is "the act of deliberately ending the life of a patient for the purpose of ending intolerable pain and/or suffering" but the Australian Human Rights Commission has rightly noted that euthanasia is sought not only by those suffering pain, "but for other reasons such as changes in quality of life resulting from catastrophic physical injury and psychological factors associated with incurable diseases". Are these people, afflicted in various ways of suffering, to be banned from accessing VAD? Who dares to take such a superior stance that they feel empowered to make decisions over how others die?

It is the case that Members of Parliament have been offered a conscience vote on this proposed Bill, but it is of great concern to me that their personal or religious views will deter them from properly representing the overwhelming majority of their constituents. Surely no legislator has the right to decide what an individual can and cannot choose to do to their own body; however, as has been obvious in many instances of proposed legislation, Members have put their personal beliefs before the expressed wishes of their constituents. This is an unacceptable act of selfishness and a gross misuse of their power and position.

It has long been a sad indictment on our society that intelligent acceptance of our changed society and beliefs, leading to changed laws suitable for changed times, has been denied to the community because of the interference of powerful religious lobbyists. This must not be allowed to continue.

I commend the commitment to invest much needed funds into the palliative care sector, as this can remain an option for many. Indeed, I was able to care for my husband at home, after his diagnosis of pancreatic cancer and until his death, with the support of a palliative care team. There is a great need for more funding to enable support for people to remain in their own home or to be cared for in specialised palliative care units. However, even the best palliative care has its limits, as those working in that sector are fully aware. It is well known that large numbers of people suffering immeasurable pain, commit suicide because palliative care does not ease their suffering.

I am relieved to note that the Queensland Bill will limit – indeed, should prevent – the ability of institutions to object to VAD, the Government already being aware that a Catholic hospice in Victoria had been blocking access to VAD, even barring access to pharmacists delivering the necessary medication to the patient. This cannot be permitted. The worrying aspect of this is that almost 60% of Australia’s palliative care services are provided by the Catholic Church. Their core ethos is to ‘neither prolong nor hasten death.’ They are prepared to ‘help you live with the pain.’ Who truly wishes to live with enormous pain? To force people to live with that pain is a disgusting and unacceptable practice.

I would like to raise a concern for those diagnosed with dementia. I note that “Having dementia is not sufficient reason for a person to access VAD, but a person diagnosed with dementia may be eligible if they meet all of the conditions, including having decision-making ability throughout the entire process.” However, “when dementia affects a person’s ability to make a decision about VAD, they will not meet the conditions to receive assistance to die.”

Having had a family member diagnosed with early dementia, I would like to note a few things. People can be diagnosed with dementia when they are still perfectly able in most things, yet they are aware of what lies ahead and definitely do not wish to get to the later stages of the disease. The knowledge that they will not have access to VAD at that stage will frighten many to commit suicide well before that time comes, denying them and their spouse or children some very happy years together. Perhaps an Advanced Health Directive could be a useful adjunct in these circumstances, with instructions for the Power of Attorney to make the decision for VAD on behalf of the person, at a particular stage in the disease. I know that my family member felt despair at the diagnosis and talked of wanting to ‘disappear’, but as it turned out, she died suddenly from something else and was spared the future she dreaded.

Finally, I think to include a time frame for access to VAD is unacceptable for the many reasons stated above. No one can truly know in what amount of time another will die. No one can ever truly know or feel the pain and suffering of another. Why does anyone think they should be permitted to make these major decisions for others? Why must there be any time frame for this very important Bill, which, if passed, would be so difficult to alter in the future? Just get it right now, in 2021.